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RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 2899  
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 1013

C O N F I D E N T I A L BAKU 000638

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/03/2018  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [PHUM](#) [AJ](#)  
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S MEETING WITH PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE  
ELDAR NAMAZOV

Classified By: Ambassador Anne E. Derse per 1.4(b,d)

¶1. (SBU) On July 1 the Ambassador met with Eldar Namazov, head of the "For the Sake of Azerbaijan" forum, and a likely candidate in the October presidential election. Namazov requested this meeting in advance of his trip to Washington, D.C. during the week of July 7, which is sponsored by the International Republican Institute (IRI). Namazov hinted that he would like the Embassy's help in arranging meetings with high-level USG officials during his visit. Namazov stated that Azerbaijan is at a critical point in its democratic development, and that strong cooperation with the United States is important in pushing Azerbaijan on the right path.

¶2. (C) Namazov also expressed his opinion on a number of other problems facing Azerbaijan. He strongly rejected the argument, put forward by many people in Azerbaijan, that Azerbaijan cannot fully develop as a democracy until the Nagorno Karabakh conflict is resolved. He expressed the opposite view: Nagorno Karabagh will not be resolved until democratic forces can open dialogue with the Armenian side. He explained, however, that there is apathy regarding the elections among the Azerbaijani people. This apathy is caused by poor living conditions, arbitrary government actions including seizure of private property, and increasing corruption which is forcing entrepreneurs to close their businesses.

¶3. (C) Namazov asserted that the influence of the United States in Azerbaijan has decreased when compared to ten years ago. Namazov believes this is due partly to the Iraq war, but mostly because people expected that, by siding with the United States, democracy would take root in Azerbaijan faster than it has. He claims that he tries to fight this assertion, including during a recent debate on Radio Liberty with Popular Front Party Chairman Ali Kerimli. According to Namazov, this decreasing influence of the U.S. is also related to increasing activities of Russia and Iran in the country. Namazov believes that Russia made an agreement with Aliyev that in exchange for Russia's support in this election, Aliyev will limit plans for Euro-Atlantic integration after the election. Namazov also explained that Aliyev's regime is copying Russia's model for how to falsify elections. While Namazov was not aware of any specific Iranian interference in the election process, he stated that their influence is very strong in the south of the country. Namazov concluded the discussion by urging stronger USG statements against the Aliyev regime, as such statements would show the Azerbaijani people that U.S. puts a priority on democratic reform in its relations with Azerbaijan, and asking for more funding for Azerbaijani NGOs and civil society.

¶4. (C) COMMENT: Namazov made it clear during the meeting that he would like to meeting with senior officials in the Department, including EUR A/S Fried and DRL A/S Kramer.

Given the GOAJ's sensitivity regarding alleged U.S. support for opposition candidates, we recommend that the Department provide the same level of treatment for all candidates. We note that Musavat Party Chair Isa Gambar may also be planning a trip to the U.S.

DERSE